

Heaven: God's Highest Hope

Finally, the moment! Can you envision it?

Heaven! We're about to enter His presence!

We don't deserve it. We haven't earned it.

We may even surprise the angels.

Angels are making the music. The music is like none we've ever heard. Suddenly, silence. Now, light—blinding light—as the Maestro steps into view.

Soon, we will walk with Him, talk with Him, and worship as He leads.

Soon God, the Author of Life and Composer of Hope, will speak our name—a name so mysterious and full o promise that only He knows it. It is our name—a new name—a name totally our own to be ours alone for all the days we spend in Heaven.

...our highest hope.

It's the end of the journey.

It's the beginning of eternal life.

It's the moment you don't want to miss.

The Gift of Unhappiness

THERE DWELLS inside you, deep within, a tiny whippoorwill. Listen. You will hear him sing. His aria mourns the dusk. His solo signals the dawn.

It is the song of the whippoorwill.

He will not be silent until the sun is seen.

We forget he is there, so easy is he to ignore. Other animals of the heart are larger, noisier, more demanding, more imposing. But none is so constant.

Other creatures of the soul are more quickly fed. More simply satisfied. We feed the lion who growls for power. We stroke the tiger who demands affection. We bridle the stallion who bucks control.

But what do we do with the whippoorwill who yearns for eternity?

For that is his song. That is his task. Out of the gray he sings a golden song. Perched in time he chirps a timeless verse. Peering through pain's shroud, he sees a painless place. Of that place he sings.

And though we try to ignore him, we cannot. He is us, and his song is ours. Our heart song won't be silenced until we see the dawn.

"God has planted eternity in the hearts of men" (Eccles. 3:10 TLB), says the wise man. But it doesn't take a wise person to know that people long for more than earth. When we see pain, we yearn. When we see hunger, we question why. Senseless deaths. Endless tears, needless loss. Where do they come from? Where will they lead?

Isn't there more to life than death?

And so sings the whippoorwill.

We try to quiet this terrible, tiny voice. Like a parent hushing a child, we place a finger over puckered lips and request silence. *I'm too busy now to talk. I'm too busy to think. I'm too busy to question.*

And so we busy ourselves with the task of staying busy.

But occasionally we hear his song. And occasionally we let the song whisper to us that there is something more. There *must* be something more.

And as long as we hear the song, we are comforted. As long as we are discontent, we will search. As long as we know there is a far-off country, we will have hope.

The only ultimate disaster that can befall us, I have come to realize, is to feel ourselves to be home on earth. As long as we are aliens, we cannot forget our true homeland.'

Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land. To intermarry with the Babylonians and forget Jerusalem.

We are not happy here because we are not at home here. We are not happy here because we are not supposed to be happy here. We are "like foreigners and strangers in this world" (1 Pet. 2:11).

Take a fish and place him on the beach.² Watch his gills gasp and scales dry. Is he happy? No! How do you make him happy? Do you cover him with a mountain of cash? Do you get him a beach chair and sunglasses? Do you bring him a *Playfish* magazine and martini? Do you wardrobe him in double-breasted fins and people-skinned shoes?

Of course not. Then how do you make him happy? You put him back in his element. You put him back in the water. He will never be happy on the beach simply because he was not made for the beach.

And you will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have your moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.

*Thou hast made us for thyself and our hearts are restless until they rest in thee.*³

Rest on this earth is a false rest. Beware of those who urge you to find happiness here; you won't find it. Guard against the false physicians who promise that joy is only a diet away, a marriage away, a job away, or a transfer away. The prophet denounced people like

this, “They tried to heal my people’s serious injuries as if they were small wounds. They said, ‘It’s all right, it’s all right.’ But really, it is not all right” (Jer. 6:14).

And it won’t be all right until we get home.

Again, we have our moments. The newborn on our breast, the bride on our arm, the sunshine on our back. But even those moments are simply slivers of light breaking through heaven’s window. God flirts with us. He tantalizes us. He romances us. Those moments are appetizers for the dish that is to come.

“No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9).

What a breathtaking verse! Do you see what it says? *Heaven is beyond our imagination*. We cannot envision it. At our most creative moment, at our deepest thought, at our highest level, we still cannot fathom eternity.

Try this. Imagine a perfect world. ‘Whatever that means to you, imagine it. Does that mean peace? Then envision absolute tranquility. Does a perfect world imply joy? Then create your highest happiness. Will a perfect world have love? If so, ponder a place where love has no bounds. Whatever heaven means to you, imagine it. Get it firmly fixed in your mind. Delight in it. Dream about it. Long for it.

And then smile as the Father reminds you, *No one has ever imagined what God has prepared for those who love him*.

Anything you imagine is inadequate. Anything anyone imagines is inadequate. No one has come close. No one. Think of all the songs about heaven. All the artists’ portrayals.

All the lessons preached, poems written, and chapters drafted.

When it comes to describing heaven, we are all happy failures.

It’s beyond us.

But it’s also within us. The song of the whippoorwill. Let her sing. Let her sing in the dark. Let her sing at the dawn. Let her song remind you that you were not made for this place and that there is a place made just for you.

But until then, be realistic. Lower your expectations of earth. This is not heaven, so don’t expect it to be. There will never be a newscast with no bad news. There will never be a church with no gossip or competition. There will never be a new car, new wife, or new baby who can give you the joy your heart craves. Only God can.

And God will. Be patient. And be listening. Listening for the song of the whippoorwill.

Chapter Two

On Seeing God

ONE OF MY favorite childhood memories is greeting my father as he came home from work. My mother, who worked an evening shift at the hospital, would leave the house around three in the afternoon. Dad would arrive home at three-thirty. My brother and I were left alone for that half-hour with strict instructions not to leave the house until Dad arrived.

We would take our positions on the couch and watch cartoons, always keeping one ear alert to the driveway. Even the best “Daffy Duck” would be abandoned when we heard his car.

I can remember running out to meet Dad and getting swept up in his big (often sweaty) arms. As he carried me toward the house, he’d put his big-brimmed straw hat on my head, and for a moment I’d be a cowboy. We’d sit on the porch as he removed his oily work boots (never allowed in the house). As he took them off I’d pull them on, and for a moment I’d be a wrangler. Then we’d go indoors and open his lunch pail. Any leftover snacks, which he always seemed to have, were for my brother and me to split.

It was great. Boots, hats, and snacks. What more could a five-year-old want?

But suppose, for a minute, that is all I got. Suppose my dad, rather than coming home, just sent some things home. Boots for me to play in. A hat for me to wear. Snacks for me to eat.

Would that be enough? Maybe so, but not for long. Soon the gifts would lose their charm. Soon, if not immediately, I’d ask, “Where’s Dad?”

Or consider something worse. Suppose he called me up and said, “Max, I won’t be coming home anymore. But I’ll send my boots and hat over, and every afternoon you can play in them.”

No deal. That wouldn’t work. Even a five-year-old knows it’s the person, not the presents, that makes a reunion special. It’s not the frills; it’s the father.

Imagine God making us a similar offer:

I will give you anything you desire. Anything. Perfect love. Eternal peace. You will never be afraid or alone. No confusion will enter your mind. No anxiety or boredom will enter your heart. You will never lack for anything.

There will be no sin. No guilt. No rules. No expectations. No failure. You will never be lonely. You will never hurt. You will never die.

Only you will never see my face.’

Would you want it? Neither would I. It’s not enough. Who wants heaven without God? Heaven is not heaven without God.

A painless, deathless eternity will be nice, but inadequate. A world shot with splendor would stagger us, but it’s not what we seek. What we want is God, We want God more than we know. It’s not that the perks aren’t attractive. It’s just that they aren’t enough. It’s not that we are greedy. It’s just that we are his and—Augustine was right—our hearts are restless until they rest in him.

Only when we find him will we be satisfied. Moses can tell you.

He had as much of God as any man in the Bible. God spoke to him in a bush. God guided him with fire. God amazed Moses with the plagues. And when God grew angry with the Israelites and withdrew from them, he stayed close to Moses. He spoke to Moses “as a man speaks with his friend” (Exod. 33:11). Moses knew God like no other man.

But that wasn’t enough. Moses yearned for more. Moses longed to see God. He even dared to ask, “Please show me your glory” (Exod. 33:18).

A hat and snack were not enough. A fiery pillar and morning manna were insufficient. Moses wanted to see God himself.

Don’t we all?

Isn’t that why we long for heaven? We may speak about a place where there are no tears, no death, no fear, no night; but those are just the benefits of heaven. The beauty of heaven is seeing God. Heaven is God’s heart.

And our heart will only be at peace when we see him. “Because I have lived right, I will see your face. ‘When I wake up, I will see your likeness and be satisfied” (Ps. 17:15).

Satisfied? That is one thing we are not. We are not satisfied.

We push back from the Thanksgiving table and pat our round bellies. “I’m satisfied,” we declare. But look at us a few hours later, back in the kitchen picking the meat from the bone.

We wake up after a good night’s rest and hop out of bed. We couldn’t go back to sleep if someone paid us. We are satisfied—for a while. But look at us a dozen or so hours later, crawling back in the sheets.

We take the vacation of a lifetime. For years we planned. For years we saved. And off we go. We satiate ourselves with sun, fun, and

good food. But we are not even on the way home before we dread the end of the trip and begin planning another.

We are not satisfied.

As a child we say, "If only I were a teenager." As a teen we say, "If only I were an adult." As an adult, "If only I were married." As a spouse, "If only I had kids." As a parent, "If only my kids were grown." In an empty house, "If only the kids would visit." As a retiree in the rocking chair with stiff joints and fading sight, "If only I were a child again."

We are not satisfied. Contentment is a difficult virtue. Why?

Because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy our deepest longing. We long to see God. The leaves of life are rustling with the rumor that we will—and we won't be satisfied until we do.

We can't be satisfied. Not because we are greedy, but because we are hungry for something not found on this earth. Only God can satisfy. Philip was right when he said, "Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need" (John 14:8).

Alas, therein lies the problem: "But you cannot see my face," God told Moses, "because no one can see me and live" (Exod. 33:20).

The eighteenth-century Hasids understood the risk of seeing God. Rabbi Uri wept every morning as he left his house to pray. He called his children and wife to his side and wept as if he would never see them again. When asked why, he gave this answer. "When I begin my prayers I call out to the Lord. Then I pray, 'Lord have mercy on us.' Who knows what the Lord's power will do to me in that moment after I have invoked it and before I beg for mercy?"²

According to legend, the first American Indian to see the Grand Canyon tied himself to a tree in terror. According to Scripture, any man privileged a peek at God has felt the same.

Sheer terror. Remember the words of Isaiah after his vision of God? "Oh, no! I will be destroyed. I am not pure, and I live among people who are not pure, but I have seen the King, the Lord All-Powerful" (Isa. 6:5).

Upon seeing God, Isaiah was terrified. Why such fear? Why did he tremble so? Because he was wax before the sun. A candle in a hurricane. A minnow at Niagara. God's glory was too great. His purity too sterling. His power too mighty.

The holiness of God illuminates the sinfulness of man.

To understand this, let's imagine you are in a theater. You have never visited one before and you are curious. You poke around backstage and look at the lights and play with the curtains and examine the props. Then you see a dressing room.

You enter and sit at the table. You look in the large mirror on the wall. What you see is what you always see when you look at your reflection. No surprises. Then you notice that the mirror is framed in light bulbs. There is a switch on the wall. You flip it on.

A dozen lights shine on your face. Suddenly you see what you had not seen. Blemishes. Wrinkles. Every mole and mark is highlighted. The light has illuminated your imperfections.

That's what happened to Isaiah. When he saw God, he didn't sigh with admiration. He didn't applaud in appreciation. He drew back in horror, crying, "I am unclean and my people are unclean!"

The holiness of God highlights our sins.

Listen to the words of another prophet. "Look, Jesus is coming with the clouds, and everyone will see him, even those who stabbed him. And all peoples of the earth will *cry loudly* because of him. Yes, this will happen!" (Rev. 1:7, emphasis mine).

Read the verse in another translation. "Riding the clouds, he'll be seen by every eye, those who mocked and killed him will see him. People from all nations and all times will tear their clothes in lament. Oh, yes" (Rev. 1:7, THE MESSAGE).

The holiness of God highlights the sin of man.

Then what do we do? If it is true that "Anyone whose life is not holy will never see the Lord" (Heb. 12:14), where do we turn?

We can't turn off the light. We can't flip the switch. We can't return to the gray. By then it will be too late.

So what can we do?

The answer is found in the story of Moses. Read carefully, very carefully, the following verses. Read to answer this question—what did Moses do in order to see God? Read slowly what God says. You may miss it.

"There is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes that place, I will put you in a large crack in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you will see my back. But my face must not be seen" (Exod. 33:21–23).

Did you see what Moses was to do? Neither did I. Did you note who did the work? So did I.

God did! God is active. God gave Moses a place to stand. God placed Moses in the crevice. God covered Moses with his hand. God passed by. And God revealed himself.

Please, underscore the point. God equipped Moses to catch a glimpse of God.

(*Holy Moses!*)

All Moses did was ask. But, oh, how he asked.

All we can do is ask. But, oh, we must ask.

For only in asking do we receive. And only in seeking do we find.

And (need I make the application?) God is the one who will equip us for our eternal moment in the Son. Hasn't he given us a rock, the Lord Jesus? Hasn't he given us a cleft, his grace? And hasn't he covered us with his hand, his pierced hand?

And isn't the father on his way to get us?

Just as my dad came at the right hour, so God will come. And just as my father brought gifts and pleasures, so will yours. But, as splendid as are the gifts of heaven, it is not for those we wait.

We wait to see the Father. And that will be enough.

Orphans at the Gate

I CAME ACROSS a sad story this week, a story about a honeymoon disaster. The newly weds arrived at the hotel in the wee hours with high hopes. They'd reserved a large room with romantic amenities. That's not what they found.

Seems the room was pretty skimpy. The tiny room had no view, no flowers, a cramped bathroom and worst of all—no bed. Just a foldout sofa with a lumpy mattress and sagging springs. It was not what they'd hoped for; consequently, neither was the night.

The next morning the sore-necked groom stormed down to the manager's desk and ventilated his anger. After listening patiently for a few minutes, the clerk asked, "Did you open the door in your room?"

The groom admitted he hadn't. He returned to the suite and opened the door he had thought was a closet. There, complete with fruit baskets and chocolates, was a spacious bedroom!

Sigh.

Can't you just see them standing in the doorway of the room they'd overlooked? Oh, it would have been so nice...

A comfortable bed instead of clumpy sofa.

A curtain-framed window rather than a blank wall.

A fresh breeze in place of stuffy air.

An elaborate restroom, not a tight toilet.

But they missed it. How sad. Cramped, cranky, and uncomfortable while comfort was a door away. They missed it because they thought the door was a closet.

Why didn't you try? I was asking as I read the piece. Get curious. Check it out. Give it a shot. Take a look. Why did you just assume the door led nowhere?

Good question. Not just for the couple but for everyone. Not for the pair who thought the room was all there was, but for all who feel cramped and packed in the anteroom called earth. It's not what we'd hoped. It may have its moments, but it is simply not what we think it should be. Something inside of us groans for more.

We understand what Paul meant when he wrote: "We...groan inwardly as we wait eagerly our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies" (Rom. 8:23 NIV).

Groan. That's the word. An inward angst. The echo from the cavern of the heart. The sigh of the soul that says the world is out of joint. Awry Misspelled. Limping.

Something is wrong.

The room is too cramped to breathe, the bed too stiff for rest, the walls too bare for pleasure.

And so we groan.

It's not that we don't try. We do our best with the room we have. We shuffle the furniture, we paint the walls, we turn down the lights. But there's only so much you can do with the place.

And so we groan.

And well we should, Paul argues. We were not made for these puny quarters. "For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened" (2 Cor. 5:6).

Our body a tent? Not a bad metaphor. I've spent some nights in tents. Nice for vacation, but not intended for daily use. Flaps fly open. Winter wind creeps from beneath. Summer showers seep from above. Canvas gets raw and tent stakes come loose.

We need something better, Paul argues. Something permanent. Something painless. Something more than flesh and bone. And until we get it, we groan.

I know I'm not telling you anything new. You know the groan of the soul. You didn't need me to tell you it's there.

But maybe you do need me to tell you it's okay. It's all right to groan. It's permissible to yearn. Longing is part of life. It's only natural to long for home when on a journey.

We aren't home yet.

We are orphans at the gate of the orphanage, awaiting our new parents. They aren't here yet, but we know they are coming. They wrote us a letter. We haven't seen them yet, but we know what they look like. They sent us a picture. And we're not acquainted with our new house yet, but we have a hunch about it. It's grand. They sent a description.

And so what do we do? Here, at the gate where the now-already meets the path of the not-yet, what do we do?

We groan. We long for the call to come home. But until he calls, we wait. We stand on the porch of the orphanage and wait. And how do we wait? With patient eagerness.

"We are hoping for something we do not have yet, and we are waiting for it *patiently* (Rom. 8:25, emphasis mine).

“We wait *eagerly* for our adoption as sons” (Rom. 8:23 NIV, emphasis mine). Patient eagerness. Not so eager as to lose our patience, and not so patient as to lose our eagerness.²

Yet, we often tend to one or the other.

We grow so patient we sleep! Our eyelids grow heavy. Our hearts grow drowsy. Our hope lapses. We slumber at our post.

Or we are so eager we demand. We demand in this world what only the next world can give. No sickness. No suffering. No struggle. We stomp our feet and shake our fists, forgetting it is only in heaven that such peace is found.

We must be patient, but not so much that we don't yearn. We must be eager, but not so much that we don't wait.

We'd be wise to do what the newlyweds never did. We'd be wise to open the door. Stand in the entryway. Gaze in the chambers. Gasp at the beauty.

And wait. Wait for the groom to come and carry us, his bride, over the threshold.

Chapter Four

View of the High Country

WHILE IN Colorado for a week's vacation, our family teamed up with several others and decided to ascend the summit of a fourteen-thousand-foot peak. We would climb it the easy way. Drive above the timberline and tackle the final mile by foot. You hearty hikers would have been bored, but for a family with three small girls, it was about all we could take.

The journey was as tiring as it was beautiful. I was reminded how the air was thin and my waist was not.

Our four-year-old Sara had it doubly difficult. A tumble in the first few minutes left her with a skinned knee and a timid step. She didn't want to walk. Actually, she *refused* to walk. She wanted to ride. First on my back, then in Mom's arms, then my back, then a friend's back, then my back, then Mom's. . . well, you get the picture.

In fact, you know how she felt. You, too, have tumbled, and you, too, have asked for help. And you, too, have received it.

All of us need help sometimes. This journey gets steep. So steep that some of us give up.

Some stop climbing. Some just sit down. They are still near the trail but aren't on it. They haven't abandoned the trip, but they haven't continued it. They haven't dismounted, but they haven't spurred either. They haven't resigned and yet haven't resolved.

They have simply stopped walking. Much time is spent sitting around the fire, talking about how things used to be. Some will sit in the same place for years. They will not change. Prayers will not deepen. Devotion will not increase. Passion will not rise.

A few even grow cynical. Woe to the traveler who challenges them to resume the journey. Woe to the prophet who dares them to see the mountain. Woe to the explorer who reminds them of their call. . . pilgrims are not welcome here.

And so the pilgrim moves on while the settler settles.

Settles for sameness.

Settles for safety.

Settles for snowdrifts.

I hope you don't do that. But if you do, I hope you don't scorn the pilgrim who calls you back to the journey.

It's worth it to keep moving.

As I tried, unsuccessfully, to convince Sara to walk, I tried describing what we were going to see. "It will be so pretty," I told her. "You'll see all the mountains and the sky and the trees." No luck—she wanted to be carried. Still a good idea, however. Even if it didn't work. Nothing puts power in the journey like a vision of the mountaintop.

By the way, a grand scene awaits you as well. The Hebrew writer gives us a *National Geographic* piece on heaven. Listen to how he describes the mountaintop of Zion. He says when we reach the mountain we will have come to "the city of the living God. . . . To thousands of angels gathered together with joy. . . . To the meeting of God's firstborn children whose names are written in heaven. . . . To God, the judge of all people, . . . and to the spirits of good people who have been made perfect. . . . To Jesus, the One who brought the new agreement from God to his people. . . . To the sprinkled blood that has a better message than the blood of Abel" (Heb. 12:22–24).

What a mountain! Won't it be great to see the angels? To finally know what they look like and who they are? To hear them tell of the times they were at our side, even in our house?

Imagine the meeting of the firstborn. A gathering of all God's children. No jealousy. No competition. No division. No hurry. We will be perfect. . . sinless. No more stumbles. No more tripping. Lusting will cease. Gossip will be silenced. Grudges forever removed.

And imagine seeing God. Finally, to gaze in the face of your Father. To feel the Father's gaze upon you. Neither will ever cease.

He will do what he promised he would do. *I will make all things new*, he promised. *I will restore what was taken. I will restore your years drooped on crutches and trapped in wheelchairs. I will restore the smiles faded by hurt. I will replay the symphonies unheard by deaf ears and the sunsets unseen by blind eyes.*

The mute will sing. The poor will feast. The wounds will heal.

I will make all things new. I will restore all things. The child snatched by disease will run to your arms. The freedom lost to oppression will dance in your heart. The peace of a pure heart will be my gift to you.

I will make all things new. New hope. New faith. And most of all new Love. The Love of which all other loves speak. The Love before which all other loves pale. The Love you have sought in a thousand ports in a thousand nights. . . this Love of mine, will be yours.'

'What a mountain! Jesus will be there. You've longed to see him. You finally will. Interesting what the writer says we will see. He doesn't mention the face of Jesus, though we will see it. He doesn't refer to the voice of Jesus, though it will shout. He mentions a part of

Jesus that most of us wouldn't think of seeing. He says we will see Jesus' blood. The crimson of the cross. The life liquid that seeped from his forehead, dripped from his hands, and flowed from his side.

The human blood of the divine Christ. Covering our sins.

Proclaiming a message: *We have been bought. We cannot be sold. Ever.*

My, what a moment. What a mountain.

Believe me when I say it will be worth it. No cost is too high. If you must pay a price, pay it! No sacrifice too much. If you must leave baggage on the trail, leave it! No loss will compare. 'Whatever it takes, do it.

For heaven's sake, do it.

It will be worth it. I promise. One view of the peak will justify the pain of the path.

By the way, our group finally made it up the mountain. We spent an hour or so at the top, taking pictures and enjoying the view. Later, on the way down, I heard little Sara exclaim proudly, "I did it!"

I chuckled. *No you didn't*, I thought. *Your mom and I did it. Friends and family got you up this mountain. You didn't do it.*

But I didn't say anything. I didn't say anything because I'm getting the same treatment. So are you. We may think we are climbing, but we are riding. Riding on the back of the Father who saw us fall. Riding on the back of the Father who wants us to make it home. A Father who doesn't get angry when we get weary.

After all, he knows what it's like to climb a mountain.

He climbed one for us.

Study Guide

CHAPTER ONE THE GIFT OF UNHAPPINESS

Points to Ponder

“Unhappiness on earth cultivates a hunger for heaven. By gracing us with a deep dissatisfaction, God holds our attention. The only tragedy, then, is to be satisfied prematurely. To settle for earth. To be content in a strange land. To intermarry with the Babylonians and forget Jerusalem.”

- 1 In what way can dissatisfaction be called an example of grace?
- 2 What does it mean to “intermarry with the Babylonians and forget Jerusalem”? Are you ever tempted to do this? Explain. “You will never be completely happy on earth simply because you were not made for earth. Oh, you will have your moments of joy. You will catch glimpses of light. You will know moments or even days of peace. But they simply do not compare with the happiness that lies ahead.”
- 1 Why does Max say we were not made for earth?
- 2 What would be the problem with becoming completely happy on earth?
“Lower your expectations of earth. This is not heaven, so don’t expect it to be. There will never be a newscast with no bad news. There will never be a church with no gossip or competition. There will never be a new car, new *wife*, or new baby who can give you the joy your heart craves. Only God can.”
- 1 How can we practically lower our expectations of earth?
- 2 Give several examples.

Wisdom from the Word

- * Read Ecclesiastes 3:11. What does it mean to say that “he set eternity in the hearts of men”? How does this reveal itself?
- * Read 1 Peter 2:11. How does an “alien” or a “stranger in the world” live differently than natives? How do sinful desires war against the soul? How does living like an alien help in this battle?
- * Read 1 Corinthians 2:9–10. Why is this probably the best picture of heaven we can understand? Does this passage give you hope? Explain.

CHAPTER TWO ON SEEING GOD

Points to Ponder

“Who wants heaven without God? Heaven is not heaven without God.”

- 1 Why would heaven cease to be heaven without God?
- 2 Would you want to live in such a place? Explain.
“Contentment is a difficult virtue. Why?
Because there is nothing on earth that can satisfy our deepest longing. We long to see God. The leaves of life are rustling with the rumor that we will—and we won’t be satisfied until we do.”
- 1 Do you agree with Max’s explanation for why contentment is hard to achieve?
- 2 Are there any other reasons it may be hard to achieve? Explain.
“Upon seeing God, Isaiah was terrified. Why such fear? Why did he tremble so? Because he was wax before the sun. A candle in a hurricane. A minnow at Niagara. God’s glory was too great. His purity too sterling. His power too mighty. The holiness of God illuminates the sinfulness of man.”
- 1 Define God’s holiness.
- 2 Why should it terrify Isaiah?

Wisdom from the Word

- * Read Exodus 33:12–23. Would you have made Moses’ request recorded in verse 18? What does it mean that he could not see God’s “face”? How does this relate to God’s holiness?

- * Read Isaiah 6:1—7; Hebrews 12:14; Revelation 1:12—18. How do people normally respond to God's unveiled holiness? Why is this so? What does this suggest about the way we should relate to God?
- * Read Psalm 17:15. What will finally satisfy us, according to David? Why should this satisfy us?

CHAPTER THREE ORPHANS AT THE GATE

Points to Ponder

"Earth is not what we'd hoped. It may have its moments, but it is simply not what we think it should be. Something inside us groans for more."

- 1 In what ways is earth not what you'd hoped for?
- 2 Do you "groan" for something more? Explain.
"We are so eager we demand. We demand in this world what only the next world can give. No sickness. No suffering. No struggle. We stomp our feet and shake our fists, forgetting it is only in heaven that such peace is found."
- 1 Do you ever find yourself demanding what properly belongs to the next world?
- 2 If so, what causes this? What is the result?

Wisdom from the Word

- * Read Romans 8:18-25. How does the hope of "redemption" make life easier in our "groaning"? How does this groaning display itself? What ultimate hope do we have?
- * Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-10. For what purpose did God make us (vs. 4-5)? Where does living by faith come in (v. 7)? What is our goal in the meanwhile (v. 9)? What motivation is given (v. 10)?

CHAPTER FOUR VIEW OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

Points to Ponder

"All of us need help sometimes. This journey gets steep. So steep that some of us give up."

- 1 Are you ever tempted to give up?
- 2 What circumstances prompt this urge? "The human blood of the divine Christ covers our sins and proclaims a message: *We have been bought. We cannot be sold. Ever.*"
- 1 How does the statement above make you feel?
- 2 Explain why.
"Believe me when I say it will be worth it. No cost is too high. If you must pay a price, pay it! No sacrifice is too much. If you must leave baggage on the trail, leave it! No loss will compare. Whatever it takes, do it."
- 1 What price might you be asked to pay in your own life? What sacrifices might you have to make?
- 2 What "baggage" do you need to "leave on the trail"? What baggage can you help others leave?

Wisdom from the Word

- * Read Hebrews 12:22-24. How is our future described in this passage? What picture do you get of it? Does this encourage you? If so, how? If not, why not?
- * Read 1 Corinthians 6:19-20. To whom do you belong, according to this passage? How did this happen? How are we to respond?
- * Read Romans 8:35-39. Are any possible enemies left off this list? How certain is our destiny? How is this destiny made certain? How does this make you feel? Why?

CHAPTER FIVE THE NAME ONLY GOD KNOWS

Points to Ponder

"Isn't it incredible to think that God has saved a name just for you? One you don't even know? We've always assumed that the name we got is the name we will keep. Apparently your future is so promising that it warrants a new title. Your eternity is so special, no common name will do."

- 1 Have you ever had a "secret name"? Have you ever given anyone else one? If so, what was the purpose of these names? How did they make the recipient feel?

- 2 If you were to be given a “secret name” based on a character trait, what trait would you most want to be known for? “There is more to your life than you ever thought. There is more to your story than what you have read. There is more to your song than what you have sung. A good author saves the best for last. A great composer keeps his finest for the finish. And God, the author of life and composer of hope, has done the same for you.”
- 1 Is it easy for you to believe that “there is more to your life than you ever thought”? Explain.
- 2 What are you most looking forward in the world to come? Describe it.

Wisdom from the Word

- * Read Isaiah 56:3—5. What problems did God address in these verses? What were the people tempted to think? Have you ever thought this way? If so, explain. What does God promise in verse 5?
- * Read Revelation 2:17. What does it mean to be an “overcomer”? What is promised such a person? Do you hope to be such a person? Explain.
- * Read Zephaniah 3:17. What role does God play in this verse? What is the mood of this verse? Does this verse give you something to look forward to? Does it encourage you? Explain.

Notes

CHAPTER ONE THE GIFT OF UNHAPPINESS

1. Augustine, *Confessions i. i*, as quoted in Peter Kreeft, *Heaven: The Hearts Deepest Longing* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press), 1989, 49. The inspiration for this essay about the whippoorwill is drawn from Kreeft’s description of “The Nightingale in the Heart,” 51—54.
2. With appreciation to Landon Saunders for this idea.
3. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Jesus Rediscovered* (New York: Doubleday, 1979), 47—48 as quoted in Peter Kreeft, *Heaven*, 63.

CHAPTER TWO ON SEEING GOD

1. With acknowledgment to Augustine, *Ennarationes in Psalmos*, 127.9, as quoted in Peter Kreeft, *Heaven*, 49.
2. Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (New York: Harper and Row, 1989), 9.

CHAPTER THREE ORPHANS AT THE GATE

1. *Leadership*, Winter 1994, 46.
2. With appreciation to John R. W. Stott, *Christian Assurance: The Hope of Glory* (London: All Souls Cassettes), d28 lb.

CHAPTER FOUR VIEW OF THE HIGH COUNTRY

1. See Revelation 21:5.

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